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Editorial by Dana Bachmann

As underlined in both the New Skills Agenda, the 2015 Riga Conclusions on Vocational Education and Training (VET)¹ and most recently the Annual Growth Survey², apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning ease the transition from school to work by enhancing the employability of learners and providing them with the skills needed for the labour market. In this context, many actions are undertaken at EU level to support the development of quality apprenticeship schemes.

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), launched in 2013, is an informal platform bringing together governments and other relevant stakeholders willing to contribute to the goal of strengthening the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships in Europe. So far, 32 European countries have joined and over 160 pledges have been made by companies and other stakeholders. It is intended to mobilise some 493,000 training and job opportunities during the period 2013-2020.

In May 2016, the European Social Partners concluded their projects on a proposal for a European quality framework for apprenticeships³ and on the cost-effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes⁴ and agreed on a joint statement "Towards a Shared Vision of Apprenticeships"⁵. This joint statement calls for a common understanding of the content of learning outcomes to underpin the provision of

quality apprenticeships requiring the involvement of the social partners, training providers and national authorities. This would help to enhance transparency on learning outcomes.

Last November, the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) discussed a draft opinion on quality and effective apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning with a view to contributing policies and actions in order to further develop and strengthen the provision, quality and cost-effectiveness of apprenticeships across Europe. While acknowledging the efforts made by governments, social partners and other stakeholders, the draft opinion stressed the need to step up reforms, and to speed up effective delivery of quality apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning. The supply and quality of apprenticeships are still often insufficient to meet the needs of the labour market, and apprenticeships are frequently seen as a second choice option by young people, their parents and society at large. It is expected that this draft opinion will be formally adopted by the ACVT in the coming weeks.

Also in the EQAVET Network, considerable attention has been devoted to the quality assurance of apprenticeship schemes and work-based learning. In 2013, a dedicated working group defined the necessary building blocks to establish and strengthen quality assurance processes in

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1. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

2. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-annual-growth-survey_en_0.pdf

3. <https://www.etuc.org/publications/european-quality-framework-apprenticeships#.WE6GboXzP67>

4. <https://www.businesseurope.eu/publications/cost-effectiveness-apprenticeship-schemes-making-case-apprenticeships>

5. This declaration is based on two projects conducted by social partners, on "The cost-effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes" (employers), and a "European Quality Framework for Apprenticeships" (trade unions) https://www.businesseurope.eu/sites/buseur/files/media/position_papers/social/apprenticeship_joint_statement_30may.pdf

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apprenticeships and work-based learning and this work is further deepened by developing guidance under the EQAVET+ process.

By their nature, apprenticeships are the product of intensive cooperation among many stakeholders – VET institutions, companies, and authorities as well as related bodies such as chambers of commerce and guidance centres. The quality of apprenticeships will be directly related to the effectiveness of the cooperation among committed stakeholders.

Apprenticeships will stay high on the EU agenda in the coming years, as illustrated by the Commission work programme for 2017 which announced a forthcoming Youth Initiative, focusing among other things on quality of apprentices and boosting the mobility of apprentices. The work carried out under EQAVET should feed directly into these new policy developments.

VET attractiveness and QA in Germany in the context of the DEQA-VET



Helena Sabbagh;
DEQA-VET

An article by Helena Sabbagh, DEQA-VET, Germany.

The Skills Agenda published in June by the European Commission has placed the resolution of the question of quality and the relevance of acquired skills and qualifications at the centre of European education policy. The Agenda calls for vocational training to be made more attractive since for many

young people and their parents in Europe, it is still only the “second choice”.

In Germany, vocational education and training (VET) continue to be held in high regard. VET is regarded as essential for economic growth, prosperity and social cohesion and opens up promising career paths and high employability to individuals due to the wide range of training and career opportunities. Internationally, it is often pointed out in this context that the number of unemployed young people in Germany is relatively low compared to the rest of Europe. The work process-oriented teaching and learning in the dual system provides young people with an opportunity to acquire specialist skills, knowledge, and abilities, in addition to personal competences, through professional experience in the world of work. This facilitates their transition into employment.

The proper functioning of the dual system in Germany is essentially based on close cooperation between federal and state governments and social partners, with business also playing a major role. According to the 2016 Report on Vocational Education and Training for the training year 2015, a positive result was achieved overall. Approximately 522,000 training contracts were concluded, which roughly corresponds to that of the previous year (-0.2%).⁶

Challenges for the dual system

Certain developments in Germany, relating to vocational education and training, necessitate specific measures to enhance the attractiveness of the dual system: A

demographic decline in the number of school leavers, and an increased tendency to opt for academic study instead of vocational training, are considered to threaten our ability to satisfy the demand for skilled personnel. Moreover, problems in matching demand and supply have increased in recent years, as regional or industry-specific demand cannot be met by supply in the training market, and the requirements of the business side cannot be met by candidates. The Federal Government views the educational integration of refugees likely to remain in the country as an opportunity and not just a challenge. Since approximately 50 percent of these people are below 25 years of age and many still do not have a vocational education and training qualification, the objective is to provide appropriate training programmes in the necessary quantity and quality.⁷ Given these and other challenges, the Federal Government is focussing its vocational education and training initiatives, programmes and measures on strengthening the capacity for integration of dual training and enhancing its attractiveness. In this regard, in addition to improved transfer opportunities and opportunities for career advancement which are to be further developed, the issue of quality and quality improvement plays a central role.

At European level, from the outset, the Federal Government has supported and shown commitment to developing common principles for quality assurance in vocational education and training and the resulting EQAVET (“European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training”) process. For this reason, in 2008, the German Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (DEQA-VET) was established and funded on behalf of the BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research). DEQA-VET has since been committed to making the existing quality of vocational education and training transparent and accountable, sponsoring the issue of quality assurance and development in VET, and initiating the development of assistance for quality assurance in educational practice as well as providing education stakeholders with appropriate tools and approaches “on site”.

6. See 2016 Report on Vocational Education and Training, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Berlin, p.7; See Data Report for the 2016 Report on Vocational Education and Training, Information and Analyses regarding the Development of Vocational Education and Training, Bonn.

7. 2016 Report on Vocational Education and Training, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Berlin, p.12,

Social partnership and proximity to practice increase acceptance

This is done in accordance with the thesis that the social standing of vocational education and training is defined largely by its quality and also by its usability in the labour market. This premise is also the basis of the Bruges Communiqué, adopted in 2010 by the competent European ministers, the European social partners and the European Commission. The Communiqué recognises high quality as a crucial requirement for the attractiveness of VET.

To make the quality of VET transparent, an understanding is required of the methods and instruments with which the excellence of an education system is developed and secured.

In Germany, the legislative basis, such as laws, regulations and recommendations, lays down minimum standards for occupational training which are binding but leave room for further quality assurance measures. It is characteristic

of Germany that these minimum standards represent, to a great extent, the result of negotiation processes involving the social partners and the federal and state governments. Experts in vocational and educational training practice and policy seek consensual solutions in the VET assigned to them on a subsidiary basis by the State, with proximity to practice ensuring acceptance of the agreements reached.

Germany is among the countries whose quality assurance mechanisms are based on established processes and methods in addition to provisions that are laid down in a series of laws and documents. To date, these have not been perceived as an overall concept, but only indirectly as tools for quality assurance. Against this background, DEQA-VET was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to outline the quality assurance mechanisms for the operational part of initial training in the dual system in a comprehensible manner for the current funding period (3/2015-12/2016). The results of the project will be published in early 2017 as a brochure which will be available in both English and German.

Enhancing the attractiveness and quality of mobility in the secondary vocational education by better usage of skills – reflections from Czech Republic



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Education, NÚV*

An article by Martina Kaňáková, NÚV, Czech Republic.

Despite a recent trend in the Czech Republic, not only among pupils but also their parents, in favour of general secondary education, the Czech Republic still benefits from a long tradition of vocational education, which is an important part of the Czech education system. In 2014 73,8 % of all individuals were involved in upper

vocational education (ISCED 3), which was substantially above the EU average (48,9%).

The Czech Republic implements several measures that should enhance the attractiveness of secondary vocational education and this is reflected in strategy papers. The new measures to support vocational education approved by the Government of the Czech Republic in January 2013 state clearly that mobility projects enhance the attractiveness, quality and efficiency of systems of vocational education and support participants to gain and use knowledge, skills and qualifications, which foster personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market, while improving quality and promoting innovation in the area of vocational education. The idea of supporting mobility of pupils and students in schools or enterprises abroad is also embedded in the document. The Quality School model, developed by the Czech School Inspectorate, and launched in 2015, includes criteria and indicators for the evaluation of schools, one criterion of

which concerns the establishment of partnerships with schools abroad and supports the active involvement of pupils and teachers in national and international projects.

Vocational education in the Czech Republic is not based on a dual system; education and training are the exclusive responsibility of schools. Curricula show a relatively high proportion of theoretical education to practical training, however, work-based training is a mandatory part of IVET curricula. Practical education is provided in companies, centres for practical training, school workshops, labs or practice enterprises.

Many secondary schools already realise that fields of study are made more attractive when there is a possibility of spending part of the study period abroad, and submit mobility projects within the Erasmus+ programme regularly. Schools establish contacts with reliable and respected international partners outside the programme, and send their students to enterprises abroad chosen on the basis of their own experiences or on the recommendations of their graduates. We are talking mainly about schools offering study in gastronomy, the hotel industry and tourism that regard experience in a work situation abroad as essential.

Those schools ensure proper length of stay in order to enable their pupils to learn all skills necessary to increase their employability. Such mobility can be 3 to 5 months long and can be organised during the summer holidays. Schools create good study conditions by preparing their own study materials and offering electronic access to all materials to students so that they can stay in touch with

the education provided by the home organisation during their stay abroad. Longer mobility periods take place during summer holidays in the high season, when pupils can work as volunteers. Pupils are motivated to take part in these stays as they can earn money for productive work. Schools consider the content of the mobility periods and apply ECVET principles. Pupils return home with a certificate issued by a respected employer which increases their future employability. Some pupils find jobs abroad directly, but for the most part they continue to cooperate with the sending institutions, informing them of new trends, and searching out suitable and reliable employers who could participate in further mobility projects.

The School Act defines obligatory practical education in terms of practical training for study programmes leading

to a vocational certificate, and work placement for study programmes leading to the Maturita examination. The internship which often takes place within mobility periods is not defined by the School Act and from this perspective is perceived as voluntary, offered only to chosen pupils.

School representatives say that pupil interest in obtaining part of a practical education abroad has decreased in recent years, and that it is therefore not possible to include a period of mobility as an obligatory part of curricula, as the school, in accordance with the existing legislation, is responsible for the delivery of obligatory practical education to all students. If schools do not receive regular grants to fund mobility periods abroad, there is a concern that parents will refuse to contribute financially.

Four-country updates on the implementation of the NRP's work programme developed within the context of the restricted call

Peer Learning Activity on quality assurance of WBL and self-assessment of VET providers, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 4-6 July 2016

Croatia

In July 2016 the Croatian Agency for VET and Adult Education organised a PLA with

more than 30 participants (at system and provider level) from nine countries and the EQAVET Secretariat. The topic was the **QA of WBL and Self-assessment of VET Providers**, as a part of the Erasmus+ project "Support to EQAVET NRP". Its purpose was to share information on the QA of WBL and approaches to self-assessment (SA), discuss how these approaches can be strengthened through collaboration and identify what lessons can be learnt from other countries' experiences.

Each country had an opportunity to share examples of good practice in WBL and SA at both system and provider levels, and to identify key features and challenges. The importance of tradition and the national approach to VET was emphasised. In every country there is a desire to increase the amount of VET provision and its quality, however it was emphasised that this can only be achieved if employers are willing to become more involved.

Some of the conclusions were following:

- QA of WBL needs to involve employers and cannot be left to VET providers only;
- VET provider staff need to see the benefits of SA;
- The move to more on-line instruments for QA and SA will continue;
- It is necessary to continue to argue for employer involvement in WBL
- An unanswered question was: Is SA an additional responsibility for VET staff or part of their duties?
- There is a value to including VET providers in PLAs as it helps to show both national and European trends.



EQAVET action grant 2016

Greece

The Greek NRP is pleased to be able to report that the project undertaken by EOPPEP under the EQAVET restricted call is now firmly under way. The objective is to investigate further quality assurance arrangements associated with the certification of non-formal, apprenticeship/work-based learning, with a view to establishing principles and guidelines that will be of use to policy-makers and practitioners in developing or enhancing quality assurance measures and policies.

An inception seminar took place on 21 September 2016, at the EOPPEP premises in Athens. The event was attended by representatives of a wide range of relevant stakeholders that are concerned with the quality assurance of certification, including the Ministry of Education, social partners and the quality assurance bodies responsible for the quality of certification in all sectors of education and training in Greece.

The context of the project was set out and the expected activities and outcomes of the project were outlined. An initial exploration conducted with participants focused on the areas of certification associated with non-formal, workplace-based learning, and of the modes of assessment in use in these areas: a follow-up survey is under way to capture more precise information. Project

personnel will also undertake a round of meetings with key experts in the field.



The information gained from these activities will contribute to a study which will also explore practice in the assessment and certification of non-formal, workplace-based learning in other countries. The results of the study, expected by mid-November 2016, will provide a platform for the further stages of the project.

A short update from the Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienest

Latvia

The State Service of Education Quality is the National Reference Point of EQAVET in Latvia. Within the Erasmus+ project we are developing questionnaires and recommendations to implement indicators of the European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training. We are also organizing seminars to promote stakeholders' involvement in the development of methods for measuring indicators as well as for developing a common understanding regarding quality culture. During the seminars on EQAVET indicators and their implementation the participants, including representatives from sectoral experts' councils, the State Education Quality Service, Academic Information Centre, Latvian National Centre for Culture, National Centre for Education, Vocational Education Association, education authorities and educational institutions, were informed of the main aims and objectives of the project. They also discussed the content of recommendations, the importance of self-evaluation and methods for measuring indicators, including questionnaires and target

groups. At the Vocational Education and Employment Trilateral Cooperation Subcouncil's meeting the developed mechanisms for measuring vocational education programme's compliance with the EQAVET indicators of quality were presented.

So far the representatives of the State Education Quality Service have visited Lithuania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Romania in order to participate in peer learning activities on different subjects regarding EQAVET. During the peer learning activities, the experience of promoting visibility and awareness of VET was shared and different mechanisms for quality assurance and models of cooperation between VET institutions and employers were discussed. The State Education Quality Service also gave an insight into its functions as well as the main objectives of quality assurance in VET.

Short summary of the Hungarian EQAVET NRP project

Hungary

The main aim of the Hungarian project is to strengthen the work of our NRP and to develop and execute activities which support primarily the national-level implementation of the tasks assigned to the NRPs under the EQAVET Recommendation.

Work started with the establishment of the National EQAVET Expert Network – a professional forum bringing together the relevant stakeholders involved in QA of VET at national level.

The Network provides professional advice and support, and elaborates professional materials for further development. The network members currently work in 2 subgroups on the following topics:

- One subgroup is working on the **adaptation of the EQAVET+ Framework to the national context**. They examine and define what the indicative descriptors and indicators could mean in the newly restructured VET, how they could be used both for IVET and adult training and and at both VET system (policy) and VET provider levels.
- The other subgroup is elaborating a **concept paper addressing the feasibility of establishing an EQAVET label at national level**. Based on this, the methodology of awarding such a label will be defined and piloted in the context of adult training.

We have also developed specific activities for the strengthening of the review phase of the Quality Cycle. During a 2nd day of pilot training, EQAVET users will be trained on how to utilise feedback and the results of assessment and evaluation in monitoring and further development/improvement of their activities.

We think that these activities will help the QA work of VET and adult training providers and promote excellence in VET in Hungary. We also hope that our project products, especially the EQAVET label, will attract the attention of other NRPs and enable us to work together on their transfer and implementation.

Events

EQAVET Forum 2016



The EQAVET Forum took place on 7 December 2016 and provided an opportunity for policy makers, VET practitioners, associations of vocational education and training (VET) providers, social partners and EQAVET users

to meet and discuss their approaches and experience of working with quality assurance systems based on EQAVET.

The Forum took place during the [European Vocational Skills Weeks](#) which sought to improve the attractiveness and image of vocational education and training.

The Forum focused on:

- Developing and using VET graduate tracking systems;
- Improving and monitoring the quality assurance of VET with an emphasis on work based learning and on self-assessment tools for VET providers.

These topics are identified in the New Skills Agenda as important in strengthening human capital, employability and competitiveness. They are therefore of particular importance in the ongoing work in EQAVET.

Throughout the Forum there were opportunities to work in small groups to discuss examples of good practice; identify the extent to which experiences from other countries can be adapted to new contexts; and work with colleagues who are addressing similar quality assurance questions. Each discussion group was led by a member of the EQAVET Steering Committee and was supported by an expert with a detailed understanding of how EQAVET can be applied in different countries.

The conclusions from the [EQAVET Forum](#) will be used to develop and refine the work of the EQAVET network.

Peer Learning Activity on EQAVET indicator 5

“Placement rate in VET programmes” Cardiff, 29 Sep – 30 Sep 2016

EQAVET in partnership with the CollegesWales (EQAVET National Reference Point in Wales) organised this peer learning activity (PLA) on 29-30 September 2016. The PLA focused on the use and implementation of EQAVET indicator 5 “Placement rate in VET programmes” which related to:

- i) destinations of VET learners after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria; and
- ii) share of employed learners after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

The discussion addressed:

- use of destination data and placement rate in VET programmes at system level
- use of destination data and placement rate in VET programmes at provider level
- Closing the Loop of the VET quality cycle: giving feedback to stakeholders on improvement actions and the role of EQAVET

View the background paper, presentations at the PLA and the policy brief prepared as a result of the discussions that took place at the activity [here](#).

All participants in this PLA had a unique opportunity to avail of a guided tour of the Cardiff and Vale College, City Centre Campus, Dumballs Rd, Cardiff, South Glamorgan CF10 5FE, Wales that provided insights into the daily operation and training system of the college.



What's New?

CollegesWales Research Project: Survey of Skills and Qualifications in Wales

Skills and training, which are accredited, are of particular importance to SMEs because of the impact that human capital improvements can have upon business outcomes, including turnover, growth and innovation.

CollegesWales has commissioned a research project with the University of South Wales Business School to further work in this area. It is believed to be the first research of its type undertaken in Wales.

The project will examine issues directly and indirectly related to skills and qualifications within SMEs in Wales. The focus will be on SMEs in the fields of retail, tourism and hospitality (RTH) which are priority sectors for the Welsh Government. The SMEs will be from a range of geographical and market focus settings and there will also be a selection of SMEs examined from other sectors in Wales in order to provide a broader comparison of skills utilisation.

The project will be conducted in 3 phases:

Phase 1 will include desk research/literature review and the use of an online survey with the SMEs identified. The survey will be designed to explore the skills and qualifications held by existing staff, the current and future skill and qualification requirements as well as labour supply gaps. The impact of skill and qualification

development on the business outcomes of SMEs will also be examined through a range of “closed questions”.

Phase 2 of the project will aim to develop the findings of Phase 1 through a mixture of interviews and focus groups with participants from a range of stakeholders and organisations across Wales.

Phase 3 of the project will be the dissemination of the survey results and recommendations for policy in Wales related to skills and qualifications as a result of the research findings.

Phase 1 has now been completed and interviews are now taking place as part of the Phase 2 process.

For more information on the project, please contact the European Programmes Group at UK NARIC via e-mail on E4@naric.org.uk.

ESQA project – European Solutions in Quality Assurance



The ESQA project focused on an exchange of experience and information on quality assurance in partner countries in order to create a Catalogue of Good Practice supporting VET providers and their supervising bodies as well as policymakers in performing tasks connected with quality assurance. The project results include national reports on QA systems and mechanisms, a comparative report and the Catalogue of Good Practice, which should all show what a positive impact effective quality assurance mechanisms and tools may have on schools and colleges, their students and surroundings, as well enriching their

portfolio of quality assurance and evaluation tools and encourage them to be used.

The project commenced in September 2014 and was completed this year. It was led by Cooperation Fund Foundation (Poland); UK NARIC (United Kingdom); Innove Foundation (Estonia) and CPI (Slovenia).

And finally...

We often look for information but are not sure where to find it – Please visit [EQAVET Resources](#) to find useful information on work-based learning, working with the EQAVET cycle, co-operation with industry, EQAVET indicators and much more – all in one place.



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